

**UKOT/CD UK Overseas Territories and
Crown Dependencies**

Training and Research Programme

Steering Group Meeting Paper

**Fera's capabilities to assist the UK
Overseas Territories with wildlife and pest
management**

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FERA'S CAPABILITIES TO ASSIST THE UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES WITH WILDLIFE AND PEST MANAGEMENT

Introduction to Fera

The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) is an executive agency of Defra, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It employs approximately 900 staff, of which 500 are scientists and 150 are bee health and plant inspectors. The organisation leads and collaborates on a broad spectrum of projects incorporating advisory, research, training and implementation projects in diverse fields ranging from wildlife conservation and pest management, the analysis of chemicals in food and water, through to the establishment and operation of port inspections and plant health quarantine systems. Fera has the largest concentration of vertebrate ecologists in the UK. This, along with the facilities and resources we have, position our scientists as leaders in wildlife management and wildlife disease control. Along with its national obligations, Fera has a long history of providing services to governments and organisations internationally and this includes a number of projects in the UK Overseas Territories. Outlined below are a number of areas in which we could build on the projects already carried out and assist the UK OTs.

Wildlife management and research

Fera provides assistance in the practical management of a range of vertebrate species. The reasons for such management are varied and range from the management of overabundant native species and the management of species that come into conflict with human interests such as birds on airfields, through to the management of feral domestic species, pests and non-native species that impact on biodiversity, agriculture and human health.

Management involves a range of both non-lethal and lethal techniques including complex and controversial specialist techniques such as trapping, shooting and poisoning. Non-lethal techniques used by Fera involve pioneering techniques such as fertility control to reduce populations, behavioural techniques such as conditioned aversion, and the development of fencing. We adhere to the highest humaneness standards and are currently world leaders in the welfare of animals being trapped.

Fera are also world leaders in wildlife research and regularly design and carry out projects on free living species using techniques and equipment such as radio tracking, censusing, and remote cameras.

Modelling and data analysis

In addition to the work areas described above, Fera scientists have skills in statistical analysis, risk analysis, population modelling and spatial analysis, and services in these areas can be provided either independently or as part of a larger project.

Biosecurity

Fera acts as the plant health quarantine service for England and Wales on behalf of Defra, determining plant health policy and providing the inspectorate (Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate) and diagnostic (Plant Pests and Diseases Programme) resource. Fera therefore acts to inspect imported plant material, oversee necessary eradication and control measure in response to positive findings, and to provide laboratory diagnostic support (bacteriology, entomology, mycology, nematology, and virology specialists supported by molecular biologists). All statutory response measures are based on pest risk assessments conducted in-house and all eradication and control work is underpinned by in-house scientific advice on chemical and biological control methodologies.

Training

Fera also provides training in a number of the techniques described above. Fera can provide training in the design and implementation of trapping regimes, the use of firearms for the management of wildlife, the use of equipment such as remote cameras and the training of staff at airports to minimize bird strike hazards. In terms of invertebrate pests and plant diseases, Fera can provide training in identification techniques, sample collection and storage, plant inspection and quarantine procedures.

Recent Projects

Fera is currently or has already carried out a number of projects in the OTs over the last thirty years. These include:

Food importation risks: An analysis of the full suite of potential pest risks associated with food importation into Pitcairn completed in 2005. This was initiated by the Pitcairn Islands Government as the importation route for food shipped into the island changed from New Zealand to Tahiti.

Advice on the management of Indian mynahs in Ascension: The Indian Mynah is one of the world's most invasive bird species and where introduced populations have established themselves, they threaten compete with native species for space and food, and cause a nuisance to residential areas. Fera advised on a management plan for the species.

The management of over-abundant gulls in Gibraltar: Due to the overabundance of food through the establishment of several land fill sites, gull populations on Gibraltar have grown to unprecedented levels, threatening migrant birds, causing a nuisance to the local populace and by increasing the bird strike hazard for the airport. Fera is currently involved in designing and implementing a long-term programme to reduce the gull population.

Feral cat management in the Cayman Islands: A growing feral cat problem on Little Cayman was threatening the native, often endemic species of reptiles and birds. Fera, in conjunction with the Cayman Islands Government, designed and implemented a long-term, low-cost feral cat management plan that is still in operation. This was associated with a training programme for local Caymanian staff in trapping and euthanasia techniques

Feral livestock management: In partnership with the RSPB, Fera has designed and is in the process of implementing a long-term management plan for feral livestock that threaten pristine ecosystems of Montserrat. Fera is also currently assessing the options for feral goat management on offshore islands in

Anguilla. The training of local government staff in the use of firearms and remote cameras has been a critical component of these projects.